

Standard 6-2

The student will demonstrate an understanding of life in ancient classical civilizations and their contribution to the modern world.

- 6.2.4** Explain the expansion and the decline of the Roman Empire, including the political and geographic reasons for its growth, the role of Julius Caesar and Augustus, and the internal weaknesses and external threats that contributed to the Empire's decline. (G, H, E)

Taxonomy Level: A 2 Understand/Factual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

This is the first time students have been taught about the expansion and decline of the Roman Empire.

In Global Studies, students will summarize the essential characteristics of Roman civilization, including factors contributing to the decline of the empire (GS-1.2).

It is essential for students understand major reasons for the expansion of the Roman Empire as well as its decline. Students should recognize the significance of Rome's geographic location in the Mediterranean. This location was conducive in promoting trade and interaction with other lands and the eventual conquest of those lands. Rome's geography also was a critical component in its security with the Alps Mountains providing protection from the north, its narrow, peninsular configuration limiting the ability of opposing land forces to operate, and the Mediterranean Sea providing an effective buffer against invasion. It was because of trade that Rome came into conflict with other powers, most notably Carthage, and through a series of wars began to expand its control throughout the Mediterranean. During the time of the emperors the empire continued to expand, especially deeper into the European continent (both northern and eastern) reaching its greatest extent under the Emperor Trajan during the Pax Romana. Students need to understand that it was Julius Caesar who was most responsible for initiating Rome's move toward a dictatorship and away from a republic. He created the First Triumvirate which moved to weaken the Senate and the patrician class. Although he was assassinated, the Second Triumvirate was created and after years of a power struggle Octavian emerged as the sole leader and was given the title "Caesar Augustus"—ending the Roman Republic.

Even as Rome was at the pinnacle of success, the factors which would lead to its decline were taking shape. Students should understand that the decline of Rome was gradual and took place over centuries. Because of this slow, intermittent process there were several factors which contributed to Rome's downfall over the centuries. One of these was the economic costs of sustaining an empire. Maintaining a military presence in distant lands and protecting the empire's trade was costly and resulted in continuously higher taxes and a dissatisfied populace. As people lost their lands and moved to cities they placed a greater economic burden on a government forced to care for them – resulting in a need to raise taxes even more. A second major factor for Rome's decline was its division into eastern and western empires and civil wars between competing factions. A third

contribution was the decline of the traditional values on which Roman society had been built and prospered. As Rome grew richer and larger there was a moral decay and corruption among its citizens that weakened it from within. A final cause of the decline was the external threats (and expensive defense of these threats) from various groups. Over the years groups such as the Vandals, Angles, Saxons, Huns, and Visigoths weakened the empire as they continuously attacked and invaded portions of the empire.

It is not essential for students to know specific battles that occurred during the Punic Wars, the effect of Roman conquest on the conquered peoples, Diocletian's reforms, or detailed information about individual groups who invaded Rome, including individuals such as Hannibal. With the exception of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus it's not necessary for students to know the emperors of Rome.

Assessment guidelines: This indicator calls for students to be able to **explain** the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Assessments should focus on cause and effects in the expansion and decline of the empire. It would be fitting for students to **compare** or **interpret** causes (and/or effects) to determine which one(s) were most important. Appropriate assessment would include students being able to **identify** the areas where the Roman Empire expanded and **explain** why this expansion occurred. Students could also be called upon to show where the external threats and invasions occurred on a map.